102D CONGRESS
1st Session
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
REPORT
102-227

DECENNIAL CENSUS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1991

SEPTEMBER 30, 1991.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

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Mr. CLAY, from the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H.R. 3280]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 3280) to provide for a study, to be conducted by the National Academy of Sciences, on how the Government can improve the decennial census of population, and on related matters, having considered the same, report favorably thereon with an amendment and recommend that the bill as amended do pass.

The amendment is as follows:

Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert in lieu thereof the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Decennial Census Improvement Act of 1991".

SEC. 2. STUDY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Commerce shall, within 30 days after the date of enactment of this Act, contract with the National Academy of Sciences (hereinafter in this Act referred to as the "Academy") to study—

(1) means by which the Government could achieve the most accurate population count possible; and

(2) consistent with the goal under paragraph (1), ways for the Government to collect other demographic and housing data.

(b) SPECIFIC CONSIDERATION.—In conducting its study, the Academy shall consider such matters as—

(1) with respect to subsection (a)(1)—

(A) ways to improve the Government's enumeration methods, especially with regard to those involving the direct collection of data from respondents;

(B) alternative methods for collecting the data needed for a basic population count, such as any involving administrative records, information from subnational or other surveys, and cumulative or rolling data-collection techniques; and

H623-4

(C) the appropriations of using sampling methods, in combination with basic data-collection techniques or otherwise, in the acquisition or refinement of population data; and

(2) with respect to subsection (a)(2)—

(A) the degree to which a continuing need is anticipated with respect to the types of data (besides data relating to the basis population count) which were collected through the last decennial census; and

(B) with respect to data for which such a need is anticipated, whether there are more effective ways to collect information using traditional methods and whether alternative sources or methodologies exist or could be implemented for obtaining reliable information in a timely manner.

(c) REPORTS.—(1) The Academy shall submit to the Secretary and to the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Government Affairs of the Senate—

(A) within 18 months after the date on which a contact is entered into under subsection (a), an interim report on its activities under this Act; and

(B) within 36 months after the date on which a contract is entered into under subsection (a), a final report which shall include a detailed statement of the Academy's findings and conclusions, as well as recommendations for any legislation or administrative action which the Academy considers appropriate.

(2) With respect to each alternative proposed or discussed in its final report, the Academy shall include—

(A) an evaluation of such alternative's relative advantages and disadvantages, as well as an analysis of its cost effectiveness; and

(B) for any alternative that does not involve the direct collection of data from individuals (about themselves or members of their household), an analysis of such alternative's potential effects on—

(i) privacy;

(ii) public confidence in the census; and

(iii) the integrity of the cenus.

EXPLANATION OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENT

The Committee amendment to H.R. 3280 substitutes a new text for the text of the introduced bill. The explanation of the substitute text is contained in the explanation of the bill as set forth hereinafter in this report.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this legislation is to provide an objective, independent review of national data needs and methods to achieve an accurate census.

COMMITTEE ACTION

On August 2, 1991, Mr. Sawyer, for himself, Mr. Ridge, Mr. Dymally, Mr. McNulty, Mr. Chandler, Ms. Norton and Mr. Eckart, introduced H.R. 3280. The bill was referred to the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service.

On September 17, 1991, the Subcommittee on Census and Population, by a vote of 4-0, and with a quorum present, approved H.R. 3280, with amendments, for full committee consideration.

On September 25, 1991, the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, by a vote of 22-0, and with a quorum present, ordered H.R. 3280 favorably reported with an amendment in the nature of a substitute.

BACKGROUND

Information collected during the decennial census is used for the allocation of political representation, as well as federal and state program funds. Information collected by the census is also used as

the basis for critical policy decisions at all levels of government. It is, therefore, important that the data be accurate and timely.

After the 1980 census, systematic planning for the 1990 census did not begin until 1984. By that time, only minor design changes could be implemented in time for the lengthy procurement and implementation process. The 1990 census design was largely the same one that the Census Bureau has used for the last forty years.

Since 1940, the Census Bureau has measured undercounts and other errors in the census. According to evaluations conducted by the Census Bureau, since measurements became available, the 1990 census was the first census that was less accurate than the preceding one. Equally alarming, the Census Bureau has not been able to reduce the differential undercount between whites and minorities, even though the overall net undercount was reduced each decade through the 1980 census. The cost of taking the census has outpaced the rate of inflation. Public cooperation in the census declined in 1990.

In light of these problems, the Committee believes that reform of the census process must be seriously considered. Planning for the 2000 census should be comprehensive and objective. An independent study of census design alternatives furthers these goals. In addition, planning and testing for the 2000 census must be conducted early enough to allow for implementation of design changes. It is, therefore, important to begin the study process now.

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) has worked extensively on census and federal statistical issues. In testimony at a subcommittee hearing on August 1, 1991, several experts recommended the Academy as an appropriate and useful forum for conducting a study of alternative ways to take the census and collect demographic data. The Committee also believes it is an appropriate organization to carry out the proposed study.

STATEMENT

The purpose of H.R. 3280 is to authorize a three-year study by the National Academy of Sciences. The Academy will examine and make recommendations about ways to make the census more accurate and ways to meet the nation's current and future data needs. The legislation requires the Department of Commerce to enter into a contract with the National Academy of Sciences within thirty days of enactment of this legislation. The Academy shall produce an interim report within 18 months of the date a contract is signed with the Department, with a final report to follow within 36 months from the date a contract is signed.

The Committee expects the Department of Commerce and the Bureau of the Census to cooperate fully with the Academy in completing this study. The Committee recognizes that the Department of Commerce has initiated a contract with the Academy for another study related to the 2000 census. The two studies should be seen as separate efforts, to be negotiated and funded separately. However, the two efforts complement each other and the Academy certainly is free to draw upon the resources of each study to enhance the other, as it sees fit.

The Committee notes that in the report accompanying H.R. 2608, the fiscal year 1992 appropriations bill for Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary, the Appropriations Committee directed that the Commerce Department set aside $1.4 million for the purpose of conducting a study by the National Academy of Sciences such as this legislation authorizes. During consideration of that bill by the House on June 13, 1991, Members of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee and the Appropriations Committee engaged in a colloquy concerning authorization for an Academy study of census methods. The Members agreed that they would work together to facilitate a study about ways to improve the next census. This bill is the fulfillment of that commitment.

The Committee expects the Academy to include in its study a review of and recommendations about the most accurate and cost effective methods to conduct a count of the population. This review shall include, but not be limited to, the basic 1990 census methodology; the use of administrative records; and the use of sampling techniques, both for the acquisition and refinement of data.

The Committee intends that the Academy pay particular attention to methods for achieving an accurate count in traditionally hard-to-count communities. Included in that review should be recommendations about counting those subpopulations that are highly mobile, or without a fixed resident, such as the homeless and migrant or seasonal farmworkers.

The study should also include a review of and recommendations about the continuing need for data currently collected on the census quiestionaire, and an analysis of future data needs. The study should address whether needed data can be collected more effectively through means other than the decennial census. Those methods may include the use of administrative records and the use of existing or new surveys, including establishment of cumulative or rolling samples.

In all areas of the study, the Academy should address privacy and confidentiality issues raised by new or revised procedures.

The Committee recognizes accuracy as the paramount goal of the census. The Committee also is interested in recommendations that address the spiraling cost of taking a census. In addition, the Committee believes that it is vital that there be a high degree of public confidence in both sensus methodology and the data it produces. The Committee believes that those three concerns are not mutually exclusive. The Committee's interest is in identifying census procedures that represent the wisest investment of funds to improve the accuracy and reliability of the measurement of the population and meet the data needs of policy makers at all levels of government and the public.

The Committee encourages the Academy to include a wide range of expertise on its study panel. The panel should include those individuals with an understanding of the policy and operational implications, both nationally and locally, of various recommendations, as well as persons with technical expertise.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

This section establishes the title of the bill as the "Decennial Census Improvement Act of 1991".

Section 2. Study

This section describes the content of the study.

Section 2(a) requires the Secretary of Commerce to contract with the National Academy of Sciences to study ways to achieve the most accurate census count and to meet other data needs. The contract must be entered into within 30 days after the date of enactment.

Section 2(b) requires the Academy, in conducting its study, to consider certain specific matters described in subsection (b).

Section 2(c) requires that the Academy submit interim and final reports to the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service of the House, the Committee on Governmental Affairs of the Senate, and the Department of Commerce within 18 and 36 months, respectively, after a contract agreement is reached. It also specifies that the final report should include an analysis of the potential impact of each recommendation on privacy, public confidence in the census and the integrity of the census.

COST

The cost estimate prepared by the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to sections 308(a) and 403 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, as amended, is set forth below:

U.S. CONGRESS,
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
Washington, DC, September 27, 1991.

Hon. WILLIAM CLAY,
Chairman, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Congressional Budget Office has reviewed H.R. 3280, the Decennial Census Improvement Act of 1991, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service on September 25, 1991.

H.R. 3280 would direct the Secretary of Commerce to contract with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to study how the federal government could achieve the most accurate population count possible, and how it could collect other demographic and housing data. The bill also would require the NAS to deliver an interim report to the Congress within 18 months and the final report within three years of signing a contract.

Based on information provided by the NAS, CBO estimates that conducting the required study and reports would cost the federal government about $1.5 million over the next three years. Enactment of H.R. 3280 would not affect direct spending or receipts. Therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures would not apply to the bill. CBO estimates that enactment of this bill would result in no cost to state or local governments.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is John Webb, who can be reached at 226-2860.

Sincerely,

ROBERT D. REISCHAUER,
Director.

OVERSIGHT

Under the rules of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, the Subcommittee on Census and Population is vested with legislative and oversight jurisdiction over the subject matter of this legislation. As a result of its hearings, investigations and deliberations, the subcommittee has concluded that there is ample need and justification for the enactment of this legislation.

The subcommittee received no report of oversight findings or recommendations from the Committee on Government Operations pursuant to section 4(c)(2) of House Rule X.

INFLATIONARY IMPACT STATEMENT

Pursuant to clause 2(l)(4) of House Rule XI, the committee has concluded that the enactment of H.R. 3280 will have no inflationary impact on the national economy.

ADMINISTRATION VIEWS

Set forth below are the views of the Department of Commerce on H.R. 3280:

GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE,
Washington, DC, September 24, 1991.

Hon. WILLIAM L. CLAY,
Chairman, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Department of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to provide you with comments on H.R. 3280, "The Decennial Census Improvement Act of 1991," as reported by the Subcommittee on Census and Population on September 17th. This bill requires the Secretary to enter into a contract with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to study the "means by which the Government could achieve the most accurate population count possible" and the "ways for the Government to collect other demographic and housing data."

The Department welcomes Congressional suggestions on the 2000 census. As Secretary Mosbacher indicated before the House Subcommittee on the Census and Population, we encouraged broad participation in activities that relate to the 2000 census. We would note, however, H.R. 3280 includes conditions that limit flexibility. In particular, difficulty might arise from section 2(a) of the bill, which requires the Secretary to execute a contract with NAS within 30 days of enactment of the Act. This section should also be made contingent upon the availability of funds through enactment of the Departments of Commerce, Justice and State, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 1992.

We would also note that the Bureau is currently negotiating a contract with the National Academy of Sciences. This contract also will provide an independent assessment of the design of the 2000 census and an independent review of the Census Bureau's research and development efforts. Thus, H.R. 3280, if enacted, could lead to duplication of effort.

We look forward to working with you in the future on this very important matter. The Office of Management and Budget advises that it has no objection to submission of this letter to the Congress.

Sincerely,

WENDELL L. WILLKIE, II.

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